

# Intimate Partner Violence in Massachusetts

## Executive Summary

Violence that occurs within the context of an intimate relationship is now recognized as a critical issue of public health and safety. Although the full extent of intimate partner violence in Massachusetts is unknown, there are several sources of statewide data that provide valuable information about this type of violence. This report contains brief descriptions of the current sources of statewide data on intimate partner violence, as well as actual data from each of these sources. Included in this report are statistics on services provided by battered women's programs, deaths, sexual assaults and weapon-related injuries perpetrated by intimate partners, incidents of partner violence reported to police departments, and civil restraining orders issued.

Massachusetts data on intimate partner violence is limited by the fact that it is collected mainly from service provider reports rather than from population-based surveys. Service provider data does not provide information about those survivors who have not accessed services or who have not disclosed abuse due to fear of retaliation or other consequences. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the information contained in this report may be used to educate public safety professionals, service providers, and the general public, as well as to aid in directing the course of future programs, policies and legislation to address this critical public health issue.

### *Services Provided by Massachusetts Battered Women's Programs*

Massachusetts battered women's programs provide hotline services, emergency shelter, counseling, legal advocacy and other services to female survivors of partner violence and their children. Since 1991, battered women's programs have submitted information about services provided to Jane Doe, Inc., formerly the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups. Information collected from battered women's programs is especially valuable because it is specific to intimate partner violence. Although it is known that many survivors do not utilize these services<sup>1</sup>, survivors of partner violence who do seek help are likely to be referred to battered women's programs by other professionals.

- *In 1995, Massachusetts battered women's programs responded to 92,255 hotline calls, provided safety planning/counseling to 29,004 clients, assisted 11,239 women obtain restraining orders and provided emergency shelter to 1,669 women and 2,209 children.*
- *The number of hotline calls served by Massachusetts battered women's programs increased 68%, from 69,016 calls in 1991 to 116,075 calls in 1994; the number of hotline calls subsequently decreased 21% to 92,255 in 1995. [Note: Some of the decrease in number of hotline calls may be due to an improved system for tracking available shelter beds, which decreases the need for survivors to make multiple calls when seeking shelter.]*

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<sup>1</sup> Greenfield LA, Rand MR, Craven D, Klaus P, Perkins C, Ringel C, et al. Violence by Intimates. Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Justice (US), Bureau of Justice Statistics; 1998 Mar. Report No.: NCJ-167237.

### ***Massachusetts Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence***

The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) has collected information on homicides suspected of being related to intimate partner violence since the end of 1993. Homicides of intimate partners in Massachusetts, as well as homicides of family, friends or acquaintances of an abused partner, are tracked. MOVA only includes cases when an intimate partner has been charged with the homicide(s) or has committed suicide after the homicide(s).

- *In 1995, MOVA documented 31 cases of people killed in Massachusetts by their intimate partners; all of the victims were women and all of the alleged perpetrators were men. The victims ranged in age from 18 to 68 and their partners ranged in age from 23 to 78. Nine of the women were known to have had active 209a protective orders; the protective orders for four others had expired. Fourteen women were killed by guns, eight by knives, and nine by other or unknown means. Of the 31 alleged perpetrators, nine committed suicide and two attempted suicide after the killing of their intimate partner.*
- *According to Jane Doe, Inc. (formerly the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups), a total of 116 women, 22 children and 31 men were killed in incidents related to intimate partner violence in Massachusetts between 1992 – 1995.*

### ***Sexual Assaults Reported to Publicly-Funded Massachusetts Rape Crisis Centers***

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has collected data from publicly-funded rape crisis centers (RCCs) since 1985. Publicly-funded RCCs collect information on each sexual assault reported by telephone hotline or in-person using a standardized encounter form. The sexual assault survivor, a family member or an acquaintance may report incidents. RCC data is valuable because it provides statewide information on a large number of sexual assaults that are not reported to the police; however, it is known that many sexual assaults are not reported to either the police or RCCs<sup>2</sup>.

- *Of all sexual assaults, including attempted rape, completed rape and physical sexual assault, reported to publicly-funded rape crisis centers in Massachusetts between 1988 - 1995, 12% were reportedly committed by intimate partners. The percentage of sexual assaults reportedly committed by intimate partners increased from 9% in 1988 to 14% in 1994 and 1995.*
- *Of sexual assaults involving intimate partners that were reported to publicly-funded rape crisis centers in Massachusetts between 1988 - 1995, 98% of the victims were female and 99% of the offenders were male; 97% of victims and 92% of offenders were between the ages of 13 and 45 at the time of the latest sexual assault.*

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<sup>2</sup> Koss MP. Hidden Rape: Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Students in Higher Education. In: Burgess, AW, editor. Rape and Sexual Assault II. New York: Garland: 1988.

### ***Injuries Reported to the Weapon-Related Injury Surveillance System***

All acute care hospital emergency departments currently report weapon-related injuries to both the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). The MDPH project that coordinates the collection of these data is the Weapon-Related Injury Surveillance System (WRISS). Both gun and sharp instrument-related injuries are reported using a standardized form. The weapon-related injury reporting system in Massachusetts is the first of its kind in the nation.

- *Of violence-related gunshot and sharp instrument injury cases treated in Massachusetts emergency departments in 1994 and 1995, intimate partners reportedly injured 26% of females and 7% of males. [Note: The relationship of the offender to the victim is unknown/missing for 25% of female victims and 50% of male victims, which may affect the validity of these observations.]*
- *Of weapon injuries to intimate partners treated in Massachusetts emergency departments in 1994 and 1995, 76% of victims were between the ages of 20 - 39; 6% were under age 20, and 18% were age 40 or older.*

### ***Incidents Reported to Selected Massachusetts Police Departments***

Local Massachusetts police departments began submitting data to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 1994. NIBRS contains information on 33 crime categories, including most violent offenses. Due to technical limitations in their data reporting and capacity and the fact that reporting to NIBRS is voluntary, not all police departments currently participate. In 1995, 64 municipal and two campus police departments, covering approximately 17% of the Massachusetts population, submitted data to NIBRS for more than half of the year.

- *Based on reports to NIBRS in 1995 by 64 municipal Massachusetts police departments, (covering approximately 17% of the state population), the average rate of intimate partner victimizations to females  $\geq$  age 15 reported to the police was 83 per 10,000 females; the corresponding rate for males  $\geq$  age 15 was 11 per 10,000 males.*
- *Of violent crimes reported to NIBRS by 66 Massachusetts police departments in 1995, 45% of violent crimes against females and 7% of violent crimes against males were reportedly committed by intimate partners. [Note: The victim-offender relationship is missing/unknown for 20% of female victims and 37% of male victims; this may affect the validity of these observations].*
- *Of all incidents involving intimate partners reported to NIBRS by 66 Massachusetts police departments in 1995, 89% of the victims were female and 89% of the offenders were male.*

### ***Civil Restraining Orders Issued by Massachusetts Courts***

In 1992, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Probation, in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety, implemented the nation's first computerized Registry of Civil Restraining Orders. Both temporary and permanent civil restraining orders issued by all district, superior and probate courts are entered into the Registry on the same day they are issued. Although the relationship between plaintiff and defendant is not routinely tracked, a 1994 study of 1,000 restraining order affidavits found that 82% were against current or former intimate partners.

- *In a 1994 sample of 1,000 civil restraining orders issued by Massachusetts courts where the relationship of the defendant is known, 82% were taken out against intimate partners, 88% of whom were male.*
- *In a 1994 sample of 1,000 civil restraining orders issued against intimate partners by Massachusetts courts, of those against spouses, 81% of plaintiffs noted in their affidavit that they had children; of those against boyfriends/girlfriends, 47% of plaintiffs noted that they had children.*
- *In a sample of civil restraining orders issued against adolescents ages 11 - 17 by Massachusetts courts between September 1992 – June 1993, 57% of the defendants were in a dating relationship with the plaintiff. Of these defendants, 81% were male, 87% were ages 16 - 17, 57% had a prior arraignment for a violent offense, and 20% had a prior arraignment for violation of a prior civil restraining order.*